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Galatians 5:16-25
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The Fruit of the Spirit

So how about that first presidential debate? I was curious to see how the candidates would behave themselves. From years past, I must confess that I had very little expectations.

While it may not be my place to tell us who we should vote for. It is my place to tell us who we should be as Christians and how we should act as we exercise our consciences to vote. I am very concerned about the negativity coming from those confessing to be followers of Jesus and the long term impacts it can have on our country and the Christian Church in America. To this Jesus has a lot to say!

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”¹

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul warns, “Watch out. If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”²

This is why we will be spending sometime from now until after the election focusing on the character traits Jesus expects to be evident by those who call themselves by His name.

So what are the fruits that we should expect from our mouths and our lives? The Apostle Paul describes them in his Letter to the Galatians as the “Fruit of the Spirit.”

This letter was written to new Gentile converts of the Christian faith. For all intents and purposes, these were people with zero Jewish religious background. Instead, they had grown up in a pagan context of idolatry, hedonism, and misogyny. They had no previous understanding that God had different expectations for how his people would live in the world. And to make matters worse, there was a group of supposedly more mature Jewish Christians who were telling them all sorts of lies about what they “needed” to do in order to be included in God’s

¹ Mathew 7:15-20

² Galatians 5:15

covenant of grace. In this Letter, Paul sets the record straight. We are included in God's covenant by grace through faith alone and not by anything we can do.

HOWEVER, he also makes clear that once the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in someone who professes to be a Christ follower there are some signs or characteristics evidenced by a person's life to authenticate that they are true believers in Jesus Christ. These characteristics are the what is known as "the Fruit of the Spirit" or good fruit that Jesus mentions above.

So as we dive into these Fruit of the Spirit join me as we read from Galatians 5:16-25.

16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. **17** For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever[a] you want. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; **20** idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions **21** and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. **24** Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **25** Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

So this morning as we begin this series, I aim to look at what else does Jesus say about the Fruit of the Spirit? What does this fruit look like in a believer's life? Is there anything we can do to cultivate this fruit in our lives? Or in other words, whose role is it to cultivate these fruit in us? And finally, how then should we live so that Jesus' fruit is produced from the tree of our lives?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "I am the vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."³

³ John 15:1-4

“It is for the Father’s glory that we bear much fruit, showing ourselves to be his disciples.”⁴

In the viticulture world of wine making, one wine maker explains why they prune grape vines the way they do.

If the vine is not pruned it reverts very quickly to its wild nature, climbing everywhere with its long, sinewy trunk and tiny, scraggly bunches of uneven grapes. Every year we need to assess the growth of the vines, and decide whether to prune them back harder, or to let them grow a bit bigger, or return them to the same size and shape they were the year before.

Part of the pleasure of pruning is that it is pure craftsmanship, like woodworking or ceramics, a blending of form and vision, assessing the vine’s growth and adjusting the pruning cuts to its individual differences. It’s also a tactile relationship with nature, the living vines that could easily grow wild guided by our hands to line up in vineyard rows ready to bear another crop of wine grapes for our pleasure and nourishment.

If we prune correctly the vine will be balanced. That means it will grow just enough. If it grows too much, the resulting wines will be thin and simple. If it grows too little, the wine will be bitter and hard. The right amount of growth — what we call “balanced growth” — results in balanced wines that are delicious and show the terroir (environmental factors).⁵

In the same way, God the Father prunes the characters stemming from our lives so that we might have just the right amount of growth, “balanced growth,” which better reflect the aroma of Christ.

What does good fruit look like?

One way to know what good fruit looks like is to know what bad fruit looks like first. Paul was very clear, this would be the acts of the sinful nature ingrained in us since birth. He said these are obvious. Sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like.

The Old Testament Law convicts us of these bad fruits since they were not in keeping with God’s expectations for his people.

On the contrast, Paul said that the Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. There is no law against these. Notice that Paul does not use the plural of the verb to be. He does not say that these fruit are, but they is. That is because these fruits are intricately connected to one another, producing one fruit, just manifest in different

⁴ John 15:8

⁵ Tish Harrison Warren, “Pruning, Arranging, and How My Ash Looks,” Buttndown Email Blog (2-21-21) as republished on PreachingToday.com website.

forms. You can't have love without joy, or joy without peace. Get my drift? The fruit is that of Jesus' Spirit shows itself in different ways, at different times.

Sort of like how our one God, manifests God's self in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One God, not three, which shows God's self in different ways, at different times.

Now this begs the question of whether or not we can cultivate this fruit on our own? No! Paul is very clear that this is something that the Spirit of Jesus produces within us. As we yield ourselves to the Father's pruning, Jesus says "we will bear much fruit. But apart from Him, we can do NO thing."

Author Susan Nikaido, editor of Discipleship Journal, wrote, "Love, joy, and all that other good stuff are the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of our efforts. We can't produce them on our own. Period. The fruit comes only as we submit our lives and let the Spirit control us."⁶

The late Reverend Billy Graham wrote, "It is interesting that the bible talks of the fruit of the Spirit rather than its fruit. A tree may bear many apples, but all come from the same tree. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is the source of all fruit in our lives."⁷

How then should we live so that Jesus' fruit is produced from the tree of our lives?

Trask and Goodall who are authors of one source book I used for this series write, "All the fruit is available whenever we need that particular type, whether it is patience with a boss or a child or kindness toward someone who is helpless to return the favor."⁸

But these fruit take time.

On a recent visit to two California vineyards, author Margaret Feinberg discovered that vintners must adopt a long-term approach to their work. According to Feinberg:

The first year a vintner plants shoots of vines rather than seeds because these yield the strongest vines. At the end of the first growing season, he cuts them back. A second year passes. He cuts them back again. Only after the third year does he see his first viable clusters of grapes. Serious vintners leave those clusters on the vines. For most vintners, it's not until year four that they bring in their first harvest.

For those growing grapes for winemaking, they'll bottle their harvest, but won't taste the fruit of their labors until year seven or eight. Most vineyards in

⁶ Susan Maycinik (now Susan Nikaido), editor of Discipleship Journal, "Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?" Discipleship Journal (Issue 91)

⁷ Billy Graham in The Collected Works of Billy Graham as quoted in Thomas E. Trask and Wayde I. Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit, Becoming the Person God Wants You to Be* (Nashville: Emanate Books, 2000), xxii.

⁸ Trask and Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit*, xxiii.

Napa Valley won't reach a breakeven point for their investment until year fifteen, eighteen or beyond.

Applying these insights to her spiritual life, Feinberg writes,

Sometimes I look at my own life and wonder, Why am I not more fruitful? And why does pruning have to hurt so much? Why does cultivating a healthy crop take so long? Yet those questions circle around the here and now. God's perspective is much different. Like a good vineyard owner, he knows how to bring about fruitfulness better than I ever will. And he is patient with me, more patient than I am with myself ... [Also], as we fulfill our callings ... we must recognize that like the vintner's, our fruitfulness will not come overnight. The first harvest of our labors may not come for three or five years.”

I want to be clear about one thing. Displaying the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives does not mean that we are to be Christian doormats. We do not have to let people walk all over us. We can self advocate. But we also don't need to be jerks as we do it. We can do this in the Spirit of Christ with all the Fruit of the Spirit present...Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

When our mission team was returning from Honduras, we were delayed two whole days because of aircraft maintenance issues. We were tired, ready to be home, and wrestling with stomach sickness. I called multiple times to speak to customer service agents to reroute us on the next available flight home. All I was getting was excuses that there was nothing they could do to help us.

I was livid. The acts of my sinful nature were flaring up. Hatred. Discord. Jealousy of other passengers flying home. Fits of rage. Selfish ambition, and such. I wanted to berate the poor customer service agent in front of me to make sure they felt as bad and as uncomfortable as I did.

But I also heard the still small voice of the Holy Spirit telling me to calm down, breathe, and be patient. I needed to exercise self control with my words. And instead of saying what I really thought, I needed to be kind.

Now what kind of impact do you think that had on the airline agent?

As I yielded to the Holy Spirit and let it take control of me, I was able to show that there was a different power living in me than that which was living in the world. I could reflect Jesus more.

But also it had an impact on me as well. Where as the Old Testament Law convicted me of my sinful nature flaring up in me. As I yielded to the Holy Spirit and allowed it's fruit to flow through me, I was set free from the bondage of my sinful nature created.

Was it easy? NO! I'm still working with the airlines to compensate us for the delays they caused us. But I am also committed to doing in a spirit of love and mutual respect.

Remember the golden rule? Treat others the same way that we want to be treated. What if our presidential candidates tried that for a change.

Next week, we will start with the first manifestation of the fruit of the spirit which is love.

So may we not satisfy the evil desires of the flesh. May we trust in the Holy Spirit to cultivate the fruit of Jesus' Holy Spirit in us. And may we pay attention the fruit that comes from our lives and others, knowing that they have great impact on the way we live among one another and the way we do politics. Amen.